

HEBRON OPEN SPACE LAND ACQUISITION COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT – FISCAL YEAR 2017/18

Brian O’Connell, Chairman

The Hebron Open Space Land Acquisition Committee (the Committee), formed by Town Ordinance on June 4, 1998, consists of seven members including one representative from the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance, the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Conservation Commission. Two members from the public also serve on the Committee. The Committee is charged with the responsibility of evaluating and recommending open space land acquisitions to the Board of Selectmen.

The Ordinance also created a Hebron Open Space Land Acquisition Fund, to be used for preservation and acquisition of open space. The Fund is financed primarily by an annual appropriation of up to ½ of a mil as approved in the town budget. Land Acquisition funds are also derived from fees received by the Town in lieu of open space dedications required with subdivision applications, from state grants and from voluntary contributions. Open Space land can be acquired or preserved through direct purchase by the Town, by the acquisition of conservation easements, the purchase of development rights or by landowner donation.

The Committee continued to work closely with other Town boards and land use commissions in open space planning and evaluating open space preservation possibilities, especially for those parcels that can be linked into a town-wide greenway system.

The Committee has adopted its top preservation priorities to include “Watercourse / Waterbody Protection”, “Farmland Preservation”, “Extension of Existing Open Space Properties”, “Air Line Trail Corridor / Connections” and “Protection of Gateway / Scenic Parcels”. The Committee has further identified its highest priority areas within the town for open space preservation to include the Fawn Brook / West Branch Fawn Brook corridor, the Raymond Brook Marsh and the Judd Brook areas for passive recreational and natural resource protection and the Gilead Hill area for farmland preservation. The Committee also continues to pursue connection from the Air Line Trail to Hebron Center via Raymond Brook Preserve.

To this end, the Committee conducted 9 Regular and Special Meetings in fiscal year 2017/18, including one site walk. In August 2017, the Committee recommended acceptance of a gracious 20.2-acre donation of property, located along side the Colchester Spur of the Air Line Trail, for open space offered by the Alpert, Fisher, Goldstein and Rosenbaum families. The proposed donation was accepted at Town Meeting in December 2017. The donated property protects sensitive wetlands and the scenic character of the trail while offering additional parking access to trail.

Also in August 2017, the Committee requested town staff to alert the State to consider the acquisition of the 189-acre Fracchia property along North Street that abuts Gay City State Park. The State is in active review and consideration of acquiring this unique property.

At Town Meetings in July 2017 and August 2017, respectively, the 10-acre Serra parcel on Grayville Road and the 48-acre Fish parcel on Gilead Street were approved for acquisition.

The Serra parcel provides a link between two parcels of town-open space and protects a portion of Hope Valley Brook and the Fish parcel that protects a scenic portion of Fawn Brook and includes an extensive trail system connecting to Gilead Elementary School. In January 2018, the Town was awarded its fifth open space state grant award. The \$102,000 grant funded 60% of the Fish property acquisition cost.

In December 2017, with assistance from town staff, the State announced the acquisition of development rights of the 193-acre Porter Farm on Porter Road, the tenth such acquisition in Hebron, encompassing over 1,000 acres protected farmland. In April 2018, the Committee approved funding of an appraisal of the St. Peter's baseball field / open space area totaling 8 acres. The town has long leased the ballfield from St. Peter's and is now considering its acquisition and improvement.

At its May 2018 meeting, the Committee approved an appraisal for the 82-acre Hibbert parcel located along Old Colchester and Northam Roads. The property abuts the Air Line Trail, includes Raymond Brook, is adjacent to Raymond Brook Marsh and includes a species of Special Concern. The property was subject to a Committee site walk and was recommended for acquisition in June 2018. A purchase agreement to acquire the property was agreed to with the landowner in July 2018. It is expected that a Town Meeting to consider acquiring this high priority property will be scheduled in the Fall of 2018.

Together with open space purchases of prior years, all researched and recommended by the Committee, the Town has preserved 600 acres of farm and forestland, including Burnt Hill Park, the scenic Raymond Brook Preserve, and open space on Jagger Lane, Church Street, Old Colchester Road, Gilead Street and along the Raymond Brook Marsh. In past years, in conjunction with the State of Connecticut, the Town contributed to the purchase of 126 acres of other valuable farm and forestland in Hebron, including open space along the Air Line Trail. In addition, the Committee has referred several large open space parcels, totaling 480 acres, to the State for their subsequent acquisition. This cooperative effort has resulted in the preservation of open space while maximizing the effectiveness of the Town's funds.

The Committee wishes to reiterate the many varied benefits of Open Space preservation including enhancing home values; mitigating future tax increases; providing for recreational areas, both passive and active which promotes tourism and helps local business; providing a desirable setting for harmonious economic growth and living environment; providing areas of historical heritage, scenic vistas and habitat for wildlife; protecting natural resources including clean air and drinking water; and preserving our rural character by protecting productive and scenic farm and forest lands.

The Committee is chaired by Brian O'Connell of the Board of Selectmen, with Planning and Zoning Commission member Frank Zitkus serving as Secretary and John Mullaney serving as Vice-Chairman. Regular meetings are scheduled on a bi-monthly basis, beginning with the first Wednesday in January, at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall, unless otherwise posted. All residents and Hebron landowners interested in participating in development of the town's open space vision are encouraged to join us at our meetings and contact the Committee. The Committee hopes to provide such landowners an opportunity to share in the future stewardship of open space land in Hebron.